

audience's understanding of the culture in which it is embedded, since comedy's effectiveness lies in its ability to surprise, to show incongruity and contradiction, and to play on an audience's expectations. The audience must have enough background knowledge to "get the joke." The study of comedy, therefore, can be a powerful educational tool since it compels students to understand why something or someone is being laughed at.

As cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham explains: "Things that create an emotional reaction will be better remembered."⁸ And in his "Essay on Comedy," George Meredith said "the test of true comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter."⁹ "Why are we laughing?" then, is a question I ask repeatedly to encourage students to explain their own thought processes. In this way then, comedy is didactic.

After comparing the fairy tale "Cinderella" with Roald Dahl's parody of it, students watch *The Princess Bride* for its parody of fairy tale elements, symbolism, and metaphor and note places in the film where they laugh. They can then discuss how comedy was created by the effect of opposite expectations: what we know fairy tales are "supposed" to be and what we see on the screen.

Because of their dearth of knowledge about quest literature, students study Arthurian legends for their symbolism, heroes, and their expression of idealism, chivalry, and courtly love. They analyze the use of proverbs in quest literature and their didactic role in stories, compare the characteristics of these stories with those of fairy tales and fables, and again connect those characteristics to other stories they have read, in class and on their own.

They revisit parody by comparing chivalry in Arthurian legends, the version of *Don Quixote* in *Man of La Mancha*, and Neil Gaiman's short story "Chivalry," identifying farce, black comedy, and screwball comedy. They also examine insanity and contradiction in Emily Dickinson's poem "Much Madness is Divinest Sense."

They revisit proverbs through the character of Sancho Panza, comparing his "proverbs" with those of Merlin, and compare contradiction and antimetabole (repetition of words in successive clauses but in transposed grammatical order) across texts to understand basic elements of comedy. Allusions are extensively discussed to connect symbolism, quotations, characters, plot sequences, and other literary features in these texts to texts read earlier in the year, in class and on their own.

When they study speeches, they analyze "I Have a Dream" for the rhetorical devices of anaphora, simile, metaphor, alliteration, onomatopoeia, and repetition, and then compare it with the speech by Old Major from *Animal Farm*. This reinforces Carol Jago's idea that, "Metaphorical thinking is not just the province of poets and flakes. It is a life skill. By examining imagery, metaphor, and symbols in . . . literature, students begin to understand how words work their magic on us. It is not just practice for an AP test, it is training for the real world" (p. 16).¹⁰

Students discuss the inspirational qualities in both speeches and compare their potential for positive propaganda with the negative outcomes and uses of it in *Animal Farm*. Their later study of John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address and a comparison of it with the character of Don Quixote in *Man of La Mancha* leads to a better understanding of antimetabole, fear, idealism, and "quixoticism."

The year concludes with an intensive study of poetry and music adapted from a lesson by Emily Cobb and Heather Lee at Crowne Pointe Academy in Westminster, Colorado. Because poetry requires more inferences on the part of the reader to fill in "holes," it makes sense to end the year by having students apply the skills they have practiced all year on more difficult texts. With "Jabberwocky," "Sonnet 18" by William Shakespeare, and Polonius's "To thine own self be true" speech from Hamlet serving as anchor pieces, students analyze poetry for tone, mood, and meaning, and compare each piece with popular music and other poetry.

Students draw on the elements of comedy and parody they have learned when they write original parodies of "Jabberwocky" and "Sonnet 18," and on rhetorical devices and stances they have learned when they translate Polonius's advice for an instruction book for kindergartners. Both practices help students internalize the elements of these texts; students must understand the underlying concepts completely in order to parody them effectively. Students also analyze the 1987 film *Can't Buy Me Love* for contradictions to Polonius's speech and write a final literary essay comparing the contradictions between the film and the speech.

In conjunction with the texts they read together, students must select and read twenty-five books independently. They keep a list of all books they complete and abandon, and receive credit each quarter for reading the required number. Jago's question is relevant here: "If the only stories students read are ones set in their own time and their own milieu, how will